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The STEP LADDER

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THE ORDER OF BOOKFELLOWS

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The
STEP LADDER

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"Who knows but if men constructed their dwellings with their own hands, and provided food for themselves and families simply and honestly enough, the poetic faculty would be universally developed, as birds universally sing when they are so engaged?"
—*Walden*, HENRY DAVID THOREAU

VOL. 40, NO. 1 SUMMER 1956 GALESBURG, ILLINOIS

Mabel M. Morris
517-1 Street Avenue West
Newton, Iowa

PRAIRIE SONG

Some linger in pines
on bare ground,
lift their heads
to brilliance of stars
grandeur of granite peaks
white blotting silence of snow

I reach for red prairie grass
as it leaps in the sun
dipping and rising,
listen to chirping
of insects in dusty weeds
hum of locusts on soft air . . .

Rose Myra Phillips
707 Park Boulevard
Attica, Indiana

DEEP IN SUMMER

Rest now. There is no need of hurry . . .
The day reclines upon a hammock breeze
That scarcely moves above the grasses.
Only the trees

And white-globed button ball reflected
Move at the water's edge where dragonfly
Darts down to let his iridescent
Image answer the bending sky,

While our warm love is left unspoken.
What are words now since on my hand you lay
Your hand with tenderest affection?
So rest, my love, this day.

Ruth Clay Price
840 Fairfield Circle
Pasadena 5, California

DRY LAKE

I stand on the shore of a pleistocene lake,
Where mud and sand in strange forms bake;
Here twenty thousand years ago
Men watched trees and flowers grow.

I hear sound crash the desert calm;
See mushroom cloud of atomic bomb,
On blue sky grey marks of swift jet plane,
On steel tracks an ammunition train.

I hold a stone ax — deep flaked by man
According to prehistoric plan —
A pleistocene weapon, a death-dealing tool.
Man is a clever, courageous — fool!

Mary M. Pronovost
1421 Coolidge Avenue
National City, California

MAGDALEN

Caught in the freshly poured tar
on a drab unremembered city street
white butterfly with torn wings fluttering . . .
the question asked and the reply
bleeding an Easter-dawn on marble skies;
while the cold winds wait,
while the dark winds hold in their fists
the stones of scorn.

WHILE LOOKING OVER REDUCED REMNANTS

Short lengths of anguish, cruelly cleft
By tongues of gossipers who left
A promise bleeding in the bud
And beauty trampled in the mud.

Frayed ravelings of stars lie pale,
That once held light before the flail
Of rumor fell and thrashed each thread
Until the silver brightness bled.

Pierced with a pin and bound with string,
April, slashed from the stem of spring —
Her heart, beneath the scars that gleam,
Weeping the color of the dream.

Whose were the tongues that struck like darts?
Left stars ripped from the sky, and parts
Of frail and white last yards of death
Cut from the cloth that gave them breath.

Mabel M. Carver
39 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York

UNWRITTEN HISTORY

I

In these first moments of illicit love
I count as barest dross all previous living:
This miracle is granted us to prove
A single-hearted, selfless, glorious giving,
As separate flesh meets, merging into one.
No state-betrothed have ever loved so well.
Our passion is a heavenly orison
Like muted bell tones on a golden bell.
I am a singing lyre for you to play:
You, Orpheus, lighting the altar fires.
The King has never sought me in the way
A woman, though she be a queen, desires;
So I shall cherish you with every breath,
Dare prison, slander, torture, even death.

II

"Highness! The Sovereign knows," spoke Lady Clare;
"He knows you've taken suddenly to ride
To hounds, to join the hunt and linger there,
Who lately feared to see a fox had died.
He sees this light upon your face, he hears
This unfamiliar music in your voice.
Long has he found sweet surcease from his fears
With your complacent handmaid as his choice.
This sudden interest shown his childless queen
Bodes ill for you, Highness, and for your throne;
The people have not liked your too-proud mien,
Would gladly watch you in last agony moan,
And see him wed a heavy-hipped princess,
Her gold, rich antidote for ugliness."

III

Dear One, it was not meant that I should be
Known as an honest woman loving a man
Wedded by law, yielding subserviently
The mind and body to his will and plan;
Rather that I should die, as die I must,
Stripped of the crown, denied all legal right,
Scoffed at by screaming mobs wild with blood-lust.
Nor shall this frail flesh cringe in commoner's fright!
This head, tomorrow, shall lie separately
Above my cold breasts: lips in blood-drained face
Stilled; the eyes blind. My soul, if soul there be,
Shall wait without repentance, lost in space.
My name will be recalled down through the ages
As sinful, wanton, made for books and stages.

Mae Winkler Goodman
17630 Lomond Boulevard
Cleveland 20, Ohio

POET READING OWN POEM

The words, I know, are mine, and yet how strange
They seem laid out precisely on the page
(Tricked like a wild canary in a cage)
Not as I pencilled in each choice or change.
Now, neatly margined, smooth, immaculate,
Even the meter falls into double space.
The words I sought slip nicely into place
(Thank goodness editors can punctuate).

Is this my poem, the sweet, elusive shape
I tried to seine like butterflies in air
Only to miss? to watch my dream escape
Until at last I caught it unaware?
The words are there, and after them, my name,
But this is not the poem I wrote. It is not the same.

Derek Brooke Williams
32 Portsmouth Terrace
Rochester 7, New York

NEW YORK THRUWAY

Some roads
Just creep
Around the barn,
Down by
The wooden gate.
Or end in tracks
In pleasant
Adirondack wild.
And citywise
Great avenues
Dwarfed by
The patterned lights
Form elegant
Taxied noisy lanes.

But the bulldozer
Has chased the engineer
To ribbon many moods
Across the state —
Bridging new hills
And claim —
Majestic openings
In unfamiliar woods:
Putting these other ways
To shame.

Margaret Shelgren
Indianola, Iowa

THE CHOICE

Note how the highway
like a white ribbon tautly pulled
into the distance
with frightening efficiency
speeds by its country cousin
old tramp of a road
traipsing up a careless hill
down a ragged hollow
bound to be ankle deep in lazy dust
and tolerant to Queen Anne's lace
and thistle.
No driven thing in search of peace
is he who takes the wagon road.
Note, calm-eyed and tranquil
how he moves
savoring sun on shoulders.

Virginia Jacques Thomsen
1015 South Coast Boulevard
La Jolla, California

TIGER TAINT

Kitty stretched on the pillow, embryo tiger
Of a jungle lair plotting its prey.
Your sneak inheritance written clear
In every twitching line of undergrowth
Camouflage of your docile fur;
The ancient rage in your fern eyes — yellow;
Accent carnivora in your saber-toothed yawn
Closing now on the cavern they expose
Of jungle you never left in the dreaming pillow

All the markings from your pads to ears;
Learned manners domestic but wild far back:
House-tamed precious slinking off to the brush
For game; tiger taint precocious pounces
Characteristic claws unsheathed, snare
The jungle, tears it to pieces; scent of blood
Curling the tail ecstatic — ravenous gorge.
Satiate, your purring engine rumbles the pillow
Knocking you awake — to bolt outdoors.

Gloria Jahoda
503 Union Avenue
Rutherford, New Jersey

HARBOR AT NIGHT

Like satin slightly disturbed the river lies.
Long lights plunge from the darkness to its depth;
Tugs jostle one another at the wharf,
Ghostly and silent in unfragrant winds.
Echoes of foghorns borne in from the night
Linger in hidden hollows by the bridge.
Here through the city runs a cord of peace,
Cutting apart the pyrotechnic plot.

RAIN IN NEW YORK

The lights, now, are like pearls
Set in rows above thin bands of steel, the streets,
And the black umbrellas closely move to and fro,
Hiding the tired faces;
The marquees dance, and red and blue neon glow
Through this misty twilight,
And the green young trees drink, that stand alone
In small and separate circles, neatly fenced,
And here below the soaring buildings crawl
The automobiles, honking petulantly;
Their tires sing low along wet pavements
While gasoline-smell wanes in the fresh-scented air.
For a moment,
This maze of light and sound and smell becomes
Slightly more intimate.

SEQUEL

Between desire and memory
Lie the palest lands,
Where pearléd mists enfold the soft, swaying grasses,
The small pointed leaves on the green April trees,
And the gossamer brooks, flowing out into silence.
This is a country of hesitation
Without visible end or beginning,
Where the wanderer passes alone,
Lost in enchanted confusion.

ETERNAL LEGEND

In lands I know, the mountains steeply rise
To shining cloth-of-gold and sapphire skies
High over small and grassy vales below.
Their distant peaks are capped, as if with snow,
By castles, gleaming white, whose towers stand
Like silver cones on battlements more grand
In their remoteness. Gardens flourish there,
Behind high walls, where princesses, all fair
and tall, and robed in jeweled gossamers,
Move in the minor strains of dulcimers
That bell-capped minstrels play, and bend like reeds
To pick the roses. Every path that leads
Beyond them is mysterious, unknown.
There have no storms come down, no rough winds blown,
But only silver rain at dusk, which seems
A soft accompaniment for secret dreams
Of young, bright-armoured princes gone to war
For love's most honored sake, and who before
The next day dies may ride in from the fray
On chargers swift, to carry brides away
Through shining mists, to other mountains where
New castles stand in same enchanted air.

Miriam Jans
820 Smith Avenue
Lansing 15, Michigan

DANCER

Tall midnight curtains scarcely part
she drifts through like a golden leaf
her tawny hair, wind-tugged, suspends her there
one moment bright and brief
emblazoned in relief against the dark.

A distant forest shiver touches her
she turns to fire, answers the wind's desire
a flame that leaps and burns, spirals and turns
each fingertip a tossed and glowing spark.

A voice more subtle than the wind calls now,
some sorcery, some antique vow
of the forest god has set her free
about her flows the breath of mystery
nothing could be more still and tall than she.
No longer leaf or flame, priestess whose name
the forest knows, she lifts her hand;
music at her command builds a shadowy nave
she weaves in ritualistic trance
the stately austere patterns of the dance.

Now it is done, she takes one final step,
as if on holy ground, silence profound
enwraps the sacred wood
she stands, a torch of light
before the rushing curtains fold her from our sight.

I ALMOST SAW THEM

Today the air has been full of angels
I have almost seen them
the avenues of the city held the breeze
from the flow of their garments
pavements sang with their luminous feet
and in Central Park the doves
spun iridescent circles round their heads.

On the subway I saw a man talking to one of them,
the man had a full black beard
the orient had carved his eyes
and his fingers were made for old books and violins
I saw him listening
his rich lips formed the answer to angelic talk.

I do not quite believe in angels
but today I almost saw them.
Tonight may be demon haunted
and tomorrow the earth may move through flat emptiness,
but today the air was full of angels.

TUNNEL

Rushing from here to there the passengers
are plunged, in this subterranean interval,
into a timeless world, a world non-human . . .
the threatening roof, the echoing wall on wall.

The lights are bog-fires, and the panting engine
is a giant reptile of pre-history;
above the clatter of the wheels is heard distinctly
a fossil mutter, a mineral cacophony.

Even the dullest and the most complacent
look up, feeling in all their nerves a vague dismay;
they blink their eyes, like eyes of startled lizards,
till, mercifully, the train swings out again to day.

Margaret G. Hindes
Box 304
Ross, California

FOR THOSE WHO HEAR

Hurried winds awake the steepled fir
And breathe in ocean-sighing pines
As clouds concur.

Silvered nimbi overspread the peaks
And needles stir like restless straw
As thunder speaks.

Fragrance-lifting, sudden-scattered rain
Beats syncopation on the dust
As cloud-bags drain.

Talking skies fill timid hearts with fear,
But spatial sound is eloquent
For those who hear.

"HE PREPARETH A TABLE BEFORE ME"

The meadow's festal board defies our fear,
The flagons of the field are rich with wine
Of hallowed springs to counteract the brine
Of doubt. Abundant feasts of grass appear
For hungry sheep, and though mistrust is near
To kill the roots of love and undermine
The spirit's growth, the bread on which we dine
Denies the faith-blind thought and hopeless tear.
The sacred meat of earth is freely laid
Before the enemy that lurks in man,
Who secretly is longing for the mead.
The fruit piled high awaits the renegade
Within the heart, by God's indulgent plan
His provender transcends all mortal need.

COLD LAVA

Black-rivered stone,
Indelibly grotesque,
Spilled from inkwell craters,
Streaked from distant rims
Down waste slopes to final grinding seas
Slow-carving cliffs of hardened flux
To tunneled fragments,
Wave-clean pebbles
And jet grained sand.

Teresa Hooley
Golden Brook Farm
Risley, Derbyshire, England

LAUS DEO

Of Earth were born the flowers, cloud white, feather-star-rayed,
Shining on the altar;
Air, fragrant, quiet, encompassed them,
One with the benison of many-colored light falling through the eastern window.
Water sustained them,
Held in the amphora either side of the cross.
Fire played upon them,
From the little heart-shaped flames of the holy candles.
The humble church worshipped,
Full-filled with the Universe, the elements of the universe, and the Creator thereof:
God was broken and poured in food finite yet everlasting.

Blood of wine in my veins,
Body of bread on my lips,
I knelt by my neighbor in love and thanksgiving:
Glory be to Thee, O God Most High.

Olive Carman
1411 Latta Road
Rochester 12, New York

BIRTH OF A FAWN

Down in wet woods
warm in leaves
wrapped in velvet luster
his mother achieves.

Eyes with wonder lighted,
he lifts a silken nose.
Satin slippers fit the supple
beauty of his toes.

Brown as the breast of autumn,
a wee thing and wild,
now dappled in daintiness
he is her child.

Frederick Vanson
8 Reader Street
Spondon, Derby, England

BENEDICTION

Now Benediction breaks on every bough;
Almond and cherry, apple and hawthorne-hedge,
Flower forth the Spirit — air's a very breath
Of blessing and of promise — all the earth
Puts on the garment of His Grace Who walks
This renascent world: God's Ghost regenerates
The withered branch of winter and restores
The flesh of leaves about the bony tree.

And shall this Spring-made miracle not reach
Also my heart's Bud? bring forth in beauty
The flower of Agape which waits His sun,
His kindness of Southwinds, His lengthening May?

O already I feel Him move and make
My mouth to show forth praise; Sin's winter break . . .

ELEGY

I speak for those who have no other voice,
Who down the long years of loss have never learned
To articulate their griefs and make of sorrow
A stepping stone to grace. O may they through
This verse and prophecy attain to tell
How the unnumbered wounds of Man have bled
Staunchless through centuries, how love and pity
Dwell in so few, how there has never been
A quiet place to go and a forgetting.

I speak for those who have no other voice:
Who in their long deaths locked expect no pardon,
Who under the pitiless sun of Power await
The final stroke, the last annihilation,
Resigned and patient as a numbered flock.

I speak for these, brothers in bone and ghost
Who ask for bread and only stones are given:
Who by their circled births and deaths and givings
In love and fear perpetuate our seed:
O but I sing not only all the grieving
Years of that loss past reckoning, but would tell
Those that are voiceless and lost how we may learn
The Eternal Pardon wrought on a lonely hill
So long ago by one who like to these
Was poor and weak and ate our bitter bread.

I speak for those who have no other voice,
And speak for One who showed us how on grief,
On the long giving and the little hope
Salvation's wrought, Whose numbered wounds still
cry
Ransom and rescue for eternity.

Marie Hand
Hollyhock Hill
Akron, Indiana

TO PROVE THE POWER OF A DREAM

My dream had stalked like a slender wraith
Across revealing sunlit days.
I clutched and groped to touch it
But failed to feel
Even one small bit of substance;
For it was unreal,
Frail as mist across a crescent moon.

This morning,
Fog-shrouds hung from every bough.
My dream lurked somewhere,
Like a dull reverberation in a cask.
Crystal globes of a prophetess
Clung to the glass
For my interpretation.
Oil-slicked pavement
Rolled thin under the weight of the fog
Held pale ominous reflections without shape.
Will-o'-the-wisp eyes
Crept from the shrouds.
Fear possessed me, for lack of understanding,
In the curtained world.

It was then your arms,
The love in your eyes,
Your breath,
Became more real than the fog.
I felt the strength
Of the dream that is our love.
The sun came through the forest
Burning the fog away —
My dream remains.

Sadie Fuller Seagrave
435 South Dodge
Iowa City, Iowa

BALLAD OF THE COUNTY FAIR

I met my true love a day at the fair,
His voice was the sweetest in all County Clare.

He sang a glad song a day at the fair,
Of meeting his true love with honey-smooth hair

He tossed me the red rose pinned on his coat,
And the words of his song put a catch in my throat.

My father and brothers who watched me the day,
Tossed him a pittance, and drew me away.

Crossly they chided: "He'll sing that same song
To each foolish maiden comes tripping along."

Next year I went searching the same county fair,
The maiden who listened had plaited black hair.

But there wasn't a red rose pinned on his coat,
And the words of his song put a sob in his throat.

I tossed him the red rose, withered and dry,
With a prayer on my lips and a smile in my eye.

He caught it and kissed it, and leaped to the ground
Though my father and brothers were watching around.

Now my father and brothers are glad men, and free,
And I have a true love to watch over me.

Lorraine Good
655 North Parkside Avenue
Chicago 44, Illinois

THE SUMMER BREEZE

The summer breeze, born to enthrall
Is like a child that runs to all
    The secret places hard to find;
    Some meadow haunt, peach trees that wind
For miles around a garden wall.

Over the street it rolls a ball
And sometimes makes a kite seem tall
    Above a city left behind
        The summer breeze.

When purple shadows drop their shawl,
And nightbirds sound a homing call
    There comes a rustle like the kind
    Small things permit, and in my mind
I see a child, laughing and small,
        The summer breeze.

HOW SOFTLY GO THE YEARS

    How softly go the years.
Step upon step, they slowly climb
To find their sure and destined way.
These years, children of aging time,
Cannot be haltered. Each new day
The stairway shortens, and between
Some midnight star and morning sun
There is a resting place, unseen
But waiting, waiting till that one
    Last moment disappears.

WHEN SPRING RETURNS

When spring returns some happy day
There will be music in the trees,
There will be magic in the breeze
And hearts will dance along their way.

Children will hurry to their play
And dreamers will take life at ease
When spring returns.

The sun wearing a blue beret
Will paint a world with memories.
Breathtaking moments where one sees
The rain spilling a bright bouquet
When spring returns.

Willis Eberman
11015 N.W. Copeland Avenue
Portland 1, Oregon

THE COIN

Bright Roman coin I wear upon my hand,
What multitudes have traded you for bread,
Beauty or lust? This emperor, long fled
From his brief throne, to what eternal land?
Small, shining piece, I have you set at last
Upon my living finger; and you move,
Even as I write across this page with love.
Some eighteen hundred years since you were cast,
You glow again, implanted on a ring
Of plated gold . . . I often watch your form,
Crudely irregular beneath the light;
And turn you, glinting, like a burning thing:
Shine, ageless coin, be beautiful and warm,
Before we enter history's chill night.

Bonnie E. Parker
11551 Roxbury
Detroit 24, Michigan

EXEMPLI GRATIA

Never mind the probing of my heart.
What will it profit you
To know what lies hidden there?
You may stare down in my eyes,
Absorbed with your intent
To read their everlasting secrets
As you would read two clear pages
Of plain-syllabled words;
But you will be blinding yourself to the true of it —
And for nothing —
Why do you think my secrets
Could be understood by you,
Even if I opened the last door
And let you peer inside?

Take my hand if you will
And study the subtle joining of it
To the strange magic of my wristbone.
But it will still be incomprehensible to you . . .
How could you learn
By the outward look of it
What impulses will flow into its movement,
What longings will curve my fingers
And my bended wrist?
Hold my body as you wish
Close enough so it would seem
To fuse inseparably with yours,
Until you must believe
There is nothing left you have not learned
Of me . . .
And did you really think
You would be able to hear a singing in my blood,
A thunder in my bones,
And a liquid music in the secrecy of me

My lips are not withheld from you.
You have brooded over them
Long and often, have listened one-minded
To the grave articulation of each word,
Have possessed them a thousand times . . .
And what has it availed you?
They are still the lips of a stranger,
No more learned by you
Than if you had left them untouched.

There are things in me
It is better that you never know . . .
But take this small comfort,
If you so desire:
I am yours . . .
As much as I can be anyone's!

Nell Jones
438 Sycamore Road
Santa Monica, California

ATOMIC BLAST

What potion does this goblet hold for men?
Its rosy hue flares into blinding light,
But men will look and men will taste, though in
The potion has been brewed a deadly might.
Too full a goblet could cause men to sway,
And every dread "sunburst-like blast" that rocks
The earth, bring more than awesome beauty's play
And pompous rumblings with the fearful shocks.
Men watch the radioactive substance leap
As quaking ground disturbances are felt,
And most exceeding gales take place and sweep
Into a vacuum-created belt.
Terrific energizing heat-waves tower
While science stands to reckon with its power.

Truda McCoy
Route 1 — Box 757
Pikeville, Kentucky

SNOW SIGNATURE

Today the space between the earth and sky
is filled with flakes
of snow forged in the cold to beautify
bare fields and brakes.
Each tiny, perfect star will lightly dance
a minuet
to music of the wind as they advance
through earth's quartette.
They brave deserted woods and fill the gloom
with dazzling white;
they garland trees with purest sparkling bloom
in one short night.
A silent aura crowns the snow-clad scene,
And Beauty writes her signature: *Serene.*

AFTER DARKNESS

Since Time's rude hand had dashed Life's brimming cup
and spilled its ambered nectar to the ground,
I thought: There will be stars if I look up . . .
the silver moon will bring a peace, new-found.
The wind whirled in my skirt and whipped my hair
pushing me outward with a piercing cry;
the moisty darkness met me everywhere:
In black-browed hills, in black and sagging sky.
I wandered in the darkness lost, alone . . .
a stranger to Life's loveliness and light.
Then suddenly, I saw the night had flown
and dawning day was reaching — rosy-bright.
to trim the hills in glory; I stood tall . . .
and filled my cup to brimming from it all.

BATTLE WITH SORROW

Sorrow does not always bend beneath
the omen of its errand, sometimes days
and long days follow till pale grey-clad weeks
file by before it dies.

We who awake in sorrow's lonely bed,
and see fantastic shapes impale the dawn,
know well the source from which our grief is fed;
know well the drop and down

into the depths. Regaining strength, the heart
will purge its grief, dark furies fall in silt,
but the embittered one builds stronger guard,
awaits the next assault.

Beulah May
4610 Mont Eagle Place
Los Angeles 41, California

CHOWDER ON SATURDAY

A brisk wind runs up and down
The winding streets of the fishing town
Where a rowboat dashes through the spray
With fish for chowder on Saturday.

My mother's platters were castles and towers,
My niece has a rooster surrounded by flowers.
But we all pull up to the table and pray,
And eat fish chowder on Saturday.

Captain Killey one summer's day
Kissed his wife and sailed away
To hunt the whale for a year and a day.
For a long long year and a day.

Captain Killey sailed back one day
His wife was waiting along the shore.
She kissed him in her shy, sweet way,
And cooked his chowder for Saturday.

Beth Duvall Russell
Baldwinsville, New York

ALL THINGS NEW

A new world happens to the poet every day:
A dawn that never flamed before
enchants his skies . . .
the song of earth
hymns vibrant with re-birth
and virgin sea,
enraptured by the eyes
of night, approaches gentle sands
or wildly flails herself into the roar
of foaming frenzy.

And there is no more . . .
no more of yesterday
in all the lands!

NOT CRICKET, CRICKET!

My window sill . . . why did you pick it, Cricket?
I must get my sleeping done
Which I can't if you go on
cricketing
the song you sing
like a squeaky metronome.

Why on earth don't you go home
to your thicket, Cricket?
or find yourself a hearth . . .
It is my night's rest you're spoiling
your confounded chirp needs oiling!
So help me, I can't stick it:

I'd crunch you through St. Peter's wicket
if I could catch you,
Cricket!

Margarette Ball Dickson
207 Third Street
Staples, Minnesota

THOMAS MANN, 1875-1955

His books were burned by thousands in the Reich,
While Hitler ran his swift but losing course;
His *Buddenbrooks* had bared men to the psyche;
But *Magic Mountain*'s ideologic force,
Was dynamited . . . *Joseph and His Brothers*
Intrigued our land (his home for fifteen years;
He, her adopted son) but woes of others
Drew him to Europe, still in grief and tears.
His house at Zurich overlooked the lake;
His last vacation . . . Holland's tulip fields,
United-Germany, he longed to make:
What man can gauge his life . . . the force it wields
Dispelling bigotry . . . decadence's spawn —
His days are ended but his work lives on.

"GENTLEMEN, I WAS WRONG"

H. L. Mencken, 1880-1956

"A funeral service for the damned", he said
Is one thing that we lack and sorely need."
Is wit a mask to hide the skins men shed;
Subconsciously, was there a smothered creed?
"I do not curse the pious, all agree
They serve well in disaster or distress;
A church is good for a community."
(Great Doubter) he was christened in the Press
"I may be wrong", wrote Mencken, "when I scoff
At God, and immortality of soul.
Should that prove true, quite humbly I will doff
My hat to the Apostles and their goal;
Plead, 'Gentlemen, I erred, so pray forgive,
Let Final Judgment winnow, weigh and sieve.' "

Margery Warner
1142 Filbert Street
San Francisco, California

MERRY GO ROUND

Air fills with steam organ;
scale high
scale low!
Brass strikes brass,
knifes the air:
sound slowing the blood
to count of mechanical drum . . .

Astride the red horse
sits the solitary rider.
Turning to left
he sees in oval mirrors
of music screen
his reflection —
half size,
over-size . . .

Turning to right he whips
his steed, clowns in joy.
Air falls between lips;
pulses quicken . . .
Swinging out
he snatches the gold ring!
Laughs at the crowd!
Watchers
clock back the years!
O split mouths, never cry:
ring is of brass!
of brass!

SILENT TRIBUTE

From desks, from stores, from banks they come to stand
beside the curb. No movement stirs or breaks
the noon hour crowd who wait in rain each side
the wide and vacant avenue. They hear
from down the street no sound of trumpet blare,
but horses' hooves along the pavement beat
a shadow-dirge, and hooded guns on line
of march roll past to click of casson wheels.
Now riders stiff upon their seats thread eyes
to end of street and distant sky. We stand
while hearts echo the thud of shuffling feet,
and slowly past the waiting crowd there rolls
that wet and gleaming gun-carriage with its
flag-covered burden. — Now are gone
the tinsel mockers who to life well-spent
give lie — leaving only covered hearts
to pay tribute with grief's silent cry.

Lori Petri
9280 State Highway 128
Healdsburg, California

THE FLEXIBLE

If I were even half as pliant
As a willow by the water's edge,
Perhaps my heart would be defiant
Of time's debilitating wedge.

If I could blend with a cloud's white curving,
Pace my whims to the ripple of streams,
Allow the wind's thin-fingered swerving
To modulate my moods and dreams,

And feel, with every opening flower,
A fragment of myself unfold,
I might annihilate the power
That makes a poet, even, grow old.

Phyllis Hanson
708 Stockley Gardens
Norfolk 7, Virginia

DEATH MASK

What early anguish of surmise,
Too bright for life, too pure for death,
Escaped to peace outside the sense
Of self consumed by hunger's breath?

So that detached (and proven here)
From song distilled beyond the hour,
This unforgettable cry of stone
Evokes the presence and the power.

And life thus held, releases now,
From earth's green core to inner skies,
The one name writ in water, where
The constant fountains rise.

SUDDENLY, THE ISLAND

There was that day we came upon the sea,
when, suddenly,
we knew that we had come too far,
too often, and too longingly.

For there at last, aflame, apart, receding,
we glimpsed the far, far island
of desire,
by which we live and die
of pure perfection's bleeding.

From sands which redispose
the musing sphere,
we entered seas of brightly-burning death,
and circled in the marveling
of mind and breath
to glimpse the island everywhere
intolerably clear.

But if by some imagined glow
of perilous circumstance,
we should fall stricken of our own
consuming flow
on that unbroken sand,
we could not rise again,
nor ever would
in terror lest that land
diminish at our touch.

Alma Paschall
234 Rosewood Avenue
Springfield, Ohio

ROMANCE, IN A NEW DIMENSION

No longer drawn in ox-cart by a swain
Romance explores the unmapped upper air
Equipped with wings to take her everywhere
In swift air-ship without an anchor-chain.
The minnesingers sang of war's mischance
But saw no green-red of a pilot's light
That wins in rivalry with star-lit night;
They sang with gusto, tales of high romance.

Our poets use what minnesingers knew:
Romance is still a welcome theme, it's true,
And those who chant a minnesinger's song
Will seldom find their music going wrong.
But now romance flies from a wing-filled sky
And does not meet us coming through the rye.

John Nixon, Jr.
Bremo Bluff, Virginia

VEAL

Not Rachel loudly wailing for her sons
Uttered a grief more eloquent than what
These Hereford ladies voice on finding not
A single calf replies to them. The bronze
Grove listens to the lonely ladies low,
Reverberates with sounds of bovine woe.

Ladies, your lamentations are in vain.
Though lows should rend the metal trees in two
So that the metal sun came bouncing through
The grove, your yearlings will not bleat again.
The fact, the harsh fact, dissonant as bronze,
Is ladies feed on other ladies' sons.

But Mars, in turn, (in case it makes you feel
Better) regards all ladies' sons as veal.

Myla Jo Closser
224 West Tulpehocken Street
Philadelphia 44, Pennsylvania

OLD JANITOR

The old janitor has gone,
who was called superintendent
to dignify his lowly services;
they have cleared out his things from the sunless room;
he has moved to a darker and narrower one.
Those who for twenty years had summoned him
now made a formal call
(after the end) upon him.
It was strange to see him resting —
the maimed hands clean and still
in the incredible immobility of death.

Among the chattels then displayed
were a few books, hand-bound: his trade
before a factory machine
sheared off his manual skill.

The after years were spent among the cans
for ashes, garbage and the fuel bins.
But always when he came to hang the screens
he studied every picture on my wall;
he had an eye for what was beautiful.
So, when I found among the litter
of the old books some drawings he had made
of flowers and fields and cattle in the shade,
I guessed it all:
the stunted secret hope that never made him bitter
rolling the ash-cans to the gutter,
shoveling snow and coal.

BOOKFELLOW NOTES

Periodicals Received on Exchange:

• *Snowy Egret,* a "unique magazine linking man with nature and exploring the delights and meanings of natural history." Published twice a year by Humphrey A. Olsen, Southland Press, 413 Pass Road, Gulfport, Mississippi. 4 issues $2 (mimeographed). Nature essays, reviews, and poetry. Beginning in Autumn 1956 payment will be made for contributions. Richard Ashman of *The New Orleans Poetry Journal* is poetry editor.

• *Venture,* a writers' workshop quarterly, offers a new service for writers. "A candid, professional, comprehensive evaluation of a story (up to 5000 words), covering: theme, plot, description, characterization, opening, climax, resolution, expression, language. $5.00 . . . Manuscripts will be returned within 3 weeks. Please address all inquiries to: *Venture,* Dept. W., 167 W. 22nd Street, New York 11, New York." Subscription price $1/year.

• *Sparrow* magazine, edited and published by Felix Stefanile, P. O. Box 25, Flushing 52, New York. An irregular quarterly of verse. No payment except in contributor's copies. 50¢/issue; $2/4 issues. Patron subscriptions invited, $8 and up: entitle donor to all *Sparrow* publications including the current, continuing Vagrom chapbook series.

• *Modern American Sonnet,* edited by Murray L. Marshall and Hazel S. Marshall, Box 1231, Washington 13, D. C. Single copies 25 cents; subscriptions $2.50. Monthly. In June 1956 issue, no. 337 is a reprint of Leta M. Edwards' "Bookshelf Vineyards." Many Bookfellow subscribers and contributors.

• *Whimsy,* an independent poetry magazine, published quarterly at 3859 Sullivan, St. Louis 7, Missouri, 50 cents, sample copy; $1.25/year. Payment is three contributor's copies per item. Report two or three days after MSS. received.

Books by Bookfellows & Others:

• *Sea Climate,* and other poems, by J. Phoenice. A modest mimeographed publication of fourten new poems by an Englishwoman. Send twenty-five cents for a copy to the publisher, Glen Coffield, Box 2386, East Portland Station, Portland 14, Oregon.

• *The Pageant of Man,* by Stanton A. Coblentz, The Wings Press, P. O. Box 332, Mill Valley, California ($3.00). Now in its third edition this is a long 317-page book of verse; called "bardic" in text and execution by Lord Dunsany.

• *The Boundless Quest,* by Denton Limbaugh, 1515 East Lancaster, Fort Worth 3, Texas. ($1.00). Forty-eight pages of verse about the atomic age, music, painting, nature and other poetic themes.

Prizes, Citations, etc.:

• Reader citations in *Avalon News,* Vol. II, no. 2 go to three Winter *Step Ladder* poems: *Old Chest,* by A. Appleton Packard; *They Know the Stars,* by Evelyn Gekler Wadsworth; and *Era*

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BOOKFELLOW NOTES (Continued)

Without Ritual, by Helen Harrington.

• The New York *Herald-Tribune* has reprinted in its Sunday "Week of Verse" column three poems from the Spring *Step Ladder*: *Evening Off,* by Jocelyn Macy Sloan, *Solstice,* by Ethan Ayer, and *Song for a Daughter,* by Lisa Grenelle.

• The second annual *Jeanette Glover Campbell* award goes to Anne O'Neill. Judged the best poem in vol. 39 of *The Step Ladder,* her *Cornwall Fragment* will be found in the Spring issue. Runner-up is *From Clark's Bridge* by Russell L. Hamm. Honorable mention is also made by the anonymous donor-judge to *Japanese Print* by Candace T. Stevenson and *Song for a Daughter,* by Lisa Grenelle. Fifteen dollars will again be awarded for the best poem in *The Step Ladder,* fortieth volume, which begins with the current issue.

• The award of the *Pearl Riese Mountain* prize for the best short, short story in the Winter and Spring issues goes to Alma Paschall for *Key of Pure Gold* (see also page 29); honorable mention to Antoni Gronowicz, for *The Man From Kitow.*

• *Modjeska, Her Life and Loves,* by Mr. Gronowicz has just been published. Thomas Yoseloff Publisher, Inc., 11 East 36th Street, New York 16, New York. ($5.00). Available from the author, publisher, or at your bookstore. *Modjeska* is a full scale biography, "recreating the passion, triumphs and despair" of one of the theater's colorful and legendary figures. A story of the great days of Bernhardt, Duse, Ada Rehan and the radiant Helen Modjeska.

• News of other campus Bookfellow activity will be found in the Spring arts convocation program which is inserted in this issue. The 1952 Bookfellow grant to Knox College, besides supporting publication of *The Step Ladder,* provides prizes for best personal libraries collected by students, a journalism award, and offers two half tuition scholarships. From the income of the grant hundreds of new books are purchased for the college library each year and an outstanding speaker in the arts is engaged each spring. This year's artist-speaker-judge was Mr. Joshua C. Taylor of the University of Chicago.

• Can any *Step Ladder* subscriber supply your overgenerous editor with several copies of the Summer 1954 *Step Ladder?* (vol. 38, no. 1). Five copies are needed for binding.

VBI LITERAE
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